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Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Joint Inspection Unit

Role of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Resident Coordinators

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit, for the consideration of the General Assembly, his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "The role of the special representatives of the Secretary-General and resident coordinators" (JIU/REP/2009/9).

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Summary

The Joint Inspection Unit report entitled "The role of the special representatives of the Secretary-General and resident coordinators" examines current barriers to the achievement of coherence and integration of the United Nations system and proposes, with a "flexible model" a series of benchmarks that can be adapted to a variety of situations within which the United Nations operates.

The present report sets forth the views of the organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations and benchmarks provided in the Joint Inspection Unit report. The views are based on inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), which welcomed the in-depth nature of the report and noted that it contains valuable observations on coherence and integration, two related policy objectives that have been pursued separately, although in parallel.

While his organizations largely accepted the general thrust of the benchmarks, their comments indicated a desire for additional clarity on the mechanisms proposed to implement each benchmark.

I. Introduction

1. The Joint Inspection Unit report entitled "The role of the special representatives of the Secretary-General and resident coordinators" examines current barriers to the achievement of coherence and integration of the United Nations system and proposes, with a "flexible model", a series of benchmarks that can be adapted to a variety of country situations.

II. General comments

2. The members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) found the Joint Inspection Unit report interesting and welcomed its in-depth nature. They noted that it contains valuable observations on coherence and integration, two related policy objectives that have been pursued separately, but in parallel.

3. The specialized agencies noted that "coherence" generally refers to improved harmonization and alignment among the United Nations agencies, funds, programmes and specialized agencies at the country level through the United Nations country teams. "Integration", in contrast, generally applies in countries where a United Nations peacekeeping or political mission is deployed alongside a country team and refers to their strategic partnership. The agencies noted that, in order to better unify these efforts, the Joint Inspection Unit proposes to reconceptualize coherence as "the overall strategic process for the United Nations system operations to achieve predefined objectives" and integration as "the operational modality to make that coherence functional" (see para. 19). Many of the benchmarks in the report are based on this redefinition. The agencies suggested that, although such an approach is valid, it could further complicate these two endeavours.

4. The agencies also noted that the report contains proposals to separate the functions of the resident coordinator (or the United Nations special representative) from the functions of the resident representative. They believe that that would likely deprive the resident coordinator of a substantive portfolio and that the lack of a distinctive institutional platform would weaken his or her ability to engage with Governments. They also suggested that the implementation of such proposals runs the risk of isolating the resident coordinator and weakening his or her coordination capacity and leverage within the United Nations country team, thereby undermining the team's ability to deliver a strategic, coordinated and coherent development programme.

5. On a more general note, the agencies did not object to the individual benchmarks themselves but found, in most cases, that the proposed mechanisms for implementing them could benefit from additional detail and analysis. They also found that many of the mechanisms required an integration of the development system that was not practical. Furthermore, the report often pointed to the responsibility of Member States in bringing about an enhanced level of integration and coherence, however the actions needed to advance this process are directed at the secretariats of the various entities rather than the Member States themselves.

6. Lastly, the agencies noted that, with its focus on establishing a benchmarking framework for coherence and integration within the United Nations system, the final report differed in scope and focus from the original plan to study the role of the special representatives of the Secretary-General and the resident coordinators. They supported the need to review the coherence and integration of the United Nations system, but suggested that their responses might have been different if questions had been posed in the context of coherence and integration within the common system rather than the role of the special representatives of the Secretary-General and the resident coordinators.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

Benchmark 1: The coherence and integration process is effectively guided by Member States

7. The agencies agreed that coherence must ultimately derive from Member States, as noted in the report, and welcomed the call for clear and achievable mandates. They also agreed on the need to continue efforts to strengthen strategic and operational planning as well as information-sharing with Member States. They noted the call of the Joint Inspection Unit to operationalize the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions vis-à-vis all agencies of the United Nations system and commented that, in the current state of governance structures, the Advisory Committee does not have oversight over specialized agencies, which have their own governance structures implemented by Member States. As a result, they questioned the practicality of pursuing that aspect of the benchmark.

Benchmark 2: Security Council mandates are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) with sufficient resources to match

8. While noting that this benchmark is directed at the Security Council, they observed that the mechanisms call for efforts to strengthen the information-gathering and analysis capacity of the Secretariat and to involve the country teams in assessment missions. The agencies indicated that many of these measures are current practice, but welcomed their reinforcement and continued improvement largely through the integrated mission-planning process and integrated task forces chaired by the lead departments.

Benchmark 3: A binding institutional framework for the United Nations system defines the operational doctrine, division of labour, rules of engagement, guidelines and procedures, agreed by CEB and approved by relevant legislative organs

9. The agencies noted that a "binding institutional framework", as called for in benchmark 3, might prove difficult to implement in practice, and questioned the ability of CEB to bring about agreement on one. The agencies suggested that a better way to achieve an appropriate division of labour might be to work through such mechanisms as the cluster on trade and productive capacity-building, where concerned agencies voluntarily agree to define their roles and delineate their responsibilities in the context of an agreed framework for cooperation.

Benchmark 4: The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs have concerted their efforts and have established coordination mechanisms

10. In commenting on benchmark 4, the agencies noted that, since the completion of the Joint Inspection Unit report, the Secretary-General has issued bulletins on the organization of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (ST/SGB/2010/1), the Department of Field Support (ST/SGB/2010/2) and the Department of Political Affairs (ST/SGB/2009/13), clarifying the roles and coordination within those departments, taking into consideration the lead department policy.

Benchmark 5: Existing inter-agency coordination mechanisms are effectively promoting integration and coherence throughout the system

11. The agencies supported the concept of "integration and coherence throughout the system", but raised some concerns regarding the mechanism described in the report. For example, regarding point (a), which called for an enhanced role for CEB, the agencies noted that the Board is focused on ensuring that the organizations of the United Nations system work in concert on social, economic and related matters. If the management and oversight of peacekeeping operations were included in the Board's role, as suggested by the Joint Inspection Unit, the Board would become involved in political and security issues, which might go beyond its mandate. In addition, the agencies noted that system-wide coherence and integration is dependent not only on better and stronger cohesion within the system but also on the implementation of a "whole-of-government" approach by Member States, in order to ensure the consistency of messages and decisions in the different United Nations intergovernmental bodies. Member States therefore have a strong role to play in ensuring such consistency, which should be reflected in the benchmark.

Benchmark 6: The United Nations system interacts with its external partners from civil society, Bretton Woods institutions, regional organizations and the private sector in a coherent manner

12. The agencies agreed in principle to benchmark 6, but considered it more practicable for interaction to be achieved by, and at the initiative of, individual organizations, with lessons learned applied later at a systemic level where feasible. In addition, they suggested that many of the mechanisms could benefit from additional analysis or clarification. For example, the role of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other legislative bodies mentioned in bullet (b) remains unclear, and there is a need for additional information regarding the mechanism required for CEB to act as a managing agent.

Benchmark 7: Regional coordination mechanisms and regional directors' teams are effectively promoting coherence and integration at the regional, subregional and country levels

13. In their response to benchmark 7, the agencies noted the suggestion to place the regional coordination mechanisms within CEB and welcomed any additional information that would justify such a construction, which has been resisted in the past.

Benchmark 8: The coherence process within the United Nations system upholds the sovereign role of each country in defining its "needs and wants" and setting its priorities

14. The agencies agreed that each Government has the sovereign right to set its own national priorities and that the United Nations should consult with Governments when establishing development priorities. However, they also suggested that, in certain situations, such as peacekeeping settings, this cannot always be the final determinant of the overall priorities. They agreed with the value of broad consensus but pointed out that, because consensus among many participants can be difficult to reach, such a broad-based approach might not prove practical.

Benchmark 9: A common mindset, conceptualization, understanding, shared vision, approach and sense of ownership among the United Nations organizations represented in the country

15. The members of the Board supported the concept expressed in benchmark 9 but would have welcomed more substantive direction on mechanisms to achieve its goal.

Benchmark 10: The existence of a flexible integration model to respond to the specific and changing needs of each country, determined through a needs assessment carried out by or in full consultation with the country team and the host country

16. The agencies supported some aspects of benchmark 10, agreeing, for example, on the need to unify representation at the country level. However, they also suggested that it would be useful to further consider the practicality of implementing some of the proposed mechanisms. For example, while the agencies supported the need for "full consultation with the national Government" during the development of the profile of the United Nations representative in a country, they believed that that was already being done through the post profile and the review of candidates by the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel, which makes recommendations to the Chair of the United Nations Development Group and the Secretary-General in resident coordinator appointments. Any further participation by national Governments might require additional consideration.

Benchmark 11: A selection process of mission leaders through CEB is in place to ensure the appointment of highly qualified managers with full authority over representatives of all United Nations system organizations in the country

17. The agencies agreed with the importance of ensuring the recruitment and appointment of highly qualified managers, although they expressed uncertainty over how that could be achieved. They noted that, while the mission leader must possess many diverse qualities, a single individual was unlikely to possess all the skills and competencies required. As a result, it was essential to develop a well-integrated leadership team. The agencies would have welcomed a more in-depth analysis of the value of having the High-level Committee on Management administer the selection process rather than the Development Group.

Benchmark 12: Leaders receive the necessary training and induction to perform their functions effectively

18. The agencies agreed that leadership training enhances the capacity of senior staff members. They further agreed that the United Nations System Staff College could play an important role in that regard and that it should be strengthened. In fact, utilizing the Staff College would prove more effective than the proposed "mobile training teams". The agencies noted that the report could reflect the need to foster joint work among leaders, thus promoting cross-fertilization, mobility among the different entities and joint training exercises.

Benchmark 13: The "one leader" at country level is empowered with the necessary authority and held accountable to the CEB machinery for successfully implementing the "one plan"

19. The Board recognized that, while the benchmark calls for "one" individual empowered to implement a joint plan, the specific level of authority of that individual would first need to be determined. The agencies also questioned the practicality of many of the specific mechanisms and pointed out that, if the Board were to serve as an oversight mechanism, its mandate would need to be altered.

Benchmark 14: Representatives of the United Nations system are given the resources to exercise the coordination responsibilities entrusted to them effectively

20. The agencies agreed that the representatives of the United Nations system should be given the appropriate level of resources needed to exercise coordination activities, but indicated that the mechanisms might be difficult to achieve. For example, placing United Nations system representatives at one staffing grade higher than all other representatives could prove challenging and result in the downgrading of some positions, particularly with respect to the specialized agencies.

Benchmark 15: A results-based approach is applied to ensure a coherent and integrated planning, programming, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting process from the very outset of the preparation of the "one plan"

21. The agencies supported the implementation of a results-based approach to programme planning, as called for in benchmark 15, but, given the different mandates of the United Nations system organizations, they questioned the feasibility of implementing a single common country programme and strategy. They noted that, in particular, the "One United Nations" approach was probably not applicable in conflict and immediate post-conflict contexts. They also indicated that many of the mechanisms might prove impractical in a reasonable timeframe; in particular, harmonizing administrative systems across all agencies could prove a difficult and costly task.

Recommendation 16: A funding mechanism exists that includes all United Nations system organizations present in the field, the host country, the Bretton Woods institutions, bilateral and multilateral donors, international and national non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society, to ensure coherence, integration and correlation between need assessments and available resources

22. While the agencies did not object to the funding mechanism described in benchmark 16, they noted that such a mechanism already exists based on the agreements for the establishment of multi-donor trust funds. They further noted that it was important to distinguish between the funding mechanism, funding sources and availability of funding, and speed of disbursement. One can have the mechanism (typically a multi-donor trust funds) but still not have available funds or there can be disbursement problems. The agencies expressed some uncertainty about the implementation of the benchmark as described. For example, it has not been proven that including the Bretton Woods institutions and individual donors in the strategic planning process would increase ownership and transparency. Similarly, it cannot be assumed that pooled funds increase efficiency, without a clear evaluation as to whether they generate more or less funding for the United Nations system.

Benchmark 17: A "one United Nations house" is set up where United Nations system organizations in the country share common premises and services while related savings are reinvested in development activities within the country

23. The agencies generally supported the call for common premises and noted the progress towards a more integrated approach to administrative functions. However, the suggestion that there should be "one United Nations house" in every country, regardless of the costs and local environment, seems impractical. The implementation of "one United Nations houses" should be based on a sound business analysis that takes into account all the costs and benefits.

Benchmark 18: Civil society representatives, Bretton Woods institutions, group donors and the private sector participate in the "One United Nations" process at country level

24. The agencies agreed that the United Nations system could benefit from an inclusive process during the development of programme activities, but noted that increasing the number of actors also increases the difficulty of reaching consensus.